

## Writing the Range: Race, Class and Culture in the Women's West

ISSN 0003-4827

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### Recommended Citation

"Writing the Range: Race, Class and Culture in the Women's West." *The Annals of Iowa* 58 (1999), 313-315.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.10265>

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parameters of black urban settlement in the West were fixed. African American communities existed in all the cities of the region and were poised to grow with the general population of the cities and of the West. The African American communities in the region differed from one another—black Houston was a segregated 'city within a city' that grew from a nearby rural population while black San Francisco evolved from a population of globally diverse origins—yet as the twentieth century progressed, such differences receded. Western urban blacks now fought for greater economic opportunity, political influence, and educational access. Those battles were to ally black westerners with sympathetic whites and other people of color. They also incorporated the region's blacks into the national struggle for racial justice.

*Writing the Range: Race, Class and Culture in the Women's West*, edited by Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. xvi, 656 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliographies, index. \$21.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY BARBARA HANDY-MARCHELLO, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage have extended their effort to put women on an equal footing with men in the history of the American West. Their first book, *The Women's West* (1987), opened the way to the study of women's experience in the West; the current book examines women's experience through the richly complex prism of culture, ethnicity, and class. The West will never be the same.

*Writing the Range* includes 29 essays by 31 authors, most of whom are historians or anthropologists. The essays are grouped into seven sections that are organized topically, but also follow a loosely chronological order. Armitage and Jameson have written a general introduction as well as a historiographical introduction to each section and a brief introduction to each essay. The effect of these introductory pieces is to draw together the disparate essays into a coherent whole.

It is impossible to describe the breadth and range of this collection of essays. Only four of them focus on European-American women, but even some of those challenge preconceived notions about white women in the West. One is on Basque women, who have rarely been studied and, surprisingly, are members of an urban community. Another of the articles on white women is on cross-dressing as a preference or as a means of seeking economic equality. Most of these carefully researched, well-written, and thoughtfully analyzed essays take the reader into an

astounding variety of ethnic communities where women established themselves as entrepreneurs, political leaders, historians, writers, and workers and survivors. The essays also introduce us to women of mixed racial heritage and women who had to establish their identities and make their way as outsiders.

Collectively, the essays raise issues important to the study of women's lives everywhere. As Jameson and Armitage emphasize, we must ask the right questions in order to understand the significance of western women's history. These authors first asked about who the women of the West were, then asked about the ways women shaped culture and the ways in which they adapted to the pressures from other sometimes dominant cultures. Gail Nomura writes of Japanese poet Teiko Tomita, who used the apt metaphor of grafting (*tsugiki*) to explain her position as an immigrant. B. Ann Rodgers and Linda Schott write about African-American Seminole people who emerged from the grafting of their separate cultures some centuries ago, and are now concerned about disappearing as a distinct culture and being culturally recast as African American only.

Cultural change is a constant, though often unwelcome, aspect of western women's lives. In these essays, women strive to retain their cultures, to incorporate new, empowering elements of other cultures, and to change under duress. Resilience, resistance, and adaptation are common to the experience of the women in these essays. Valerie Matsumoto writes of second-generation Japanese Americans (Nisei) consciously negotiating a new culture from useful parts of both the traditions of their parents and the ways of European Americans around them.

War shadows racial, class, and cultural change in many of these essays, but none of the authors addresses it directly. War creates cultural chaos, much of which is experienced by women who are left to rebuild their families and societies after the warriors have gone. Some women, however, as Shirley Ann Moore demonstrates, were able to take advantage of wartime economic demands to improve the quality of their lives.

This fine book is a welcome addition to the history of the American West. It departs from many of the recent collections of essays because of its substantial presentation of new information about people and events. It has a few weaknesses. A couple of the essays are not as strong as most of the others, though they approach topics that are difficult to research or represent early research efforts. More troubling, the collection as a whole presents racial and class conflicts between or among non-European Americans without attempting to assess the ori-

gin, meaning, and results of these problems. To take but one example, how do we celebrate the success of middle-class Mexican-American women without wondering about the exclusion of working-class women from their civic organizations?

Stirring the history of the American West with the analytical tools of gender, race, and class reveals aspects of cultural strength that have been hidden in less inclusive historical treatments. Armitage and Jameson and the authors of the individual essays have, indeed, advanced our knowledge of the American West as a cultural crossroads.

*Re-Imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art*, by Richard W. Etulain. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996. xxviii, 241 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$45.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY JONI L. KINSEY, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

This is not the book I expected when I first began reading it. Proclaiming in the initial sentence that this is an "introductory, non-theoretical study of . . . the main cultural-intellectual contours of the twentieth-century American West," Etulain seems to promise a wide-ranging overview of the subject, full of both information and insights about books, events, and images, in a format geared toward readers hoping for a comprehensive yet not overly exhaustive view of the subject. In some ways he fulfills his goal, but his uneven treatment of his three subjects—fiction, history, and art—renders the book unusual and somewhat disappointing, even as it offers much good material.

After a thoughtful and solidly grounded preface that introduces the whole, Etulain divides the West as subject into three roughly chronological and logical categories—frontier, region, and post-region—and within each of these he offers chapters on fiction, history, and art. Tackling such a monumental subject as the twentieth-century West through any *one* of these genres would seem a complex enough task, but taking on all three in a short book is daunting. Consequently, the presentation, at least in the fiction and art chapters, is necessarily limited to basic material rather than in-depth treatments. If this were consistent throughout it would constitute a respectable study for a general audience and be worthy of recommendation on that merit. The history chapters, however, are quite different, and render the whole a disorienting combination of aspirations.

The fiction chapters read much like a collection of book reviews or author biographies. Etulain presents and discusses a number of the most important writers and their texts, and despite their somewhat

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